

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 730  
By Sharp

A RESOLUTION urging the Department of Health to inform hospital and emergency service personnel of the dangers associated with latex allergies, and to establish protocols to address the care of patients with latex allergies.

WHEREAS, it is incumbent upon the members of this General Assembly to work to ensure the continued good health and well-being of all Tennesseans; and

WHEREAS, recent occurrences of allergies to natural rubber latex have prompted a call, from citizens and members of the health care profession, for hospitals and emergency medical service personnel to reduce the risk of these serious and potentially fatal allergic reactions; and

WHEREAS, natural rubber latex from tropical rubber trees is processed to make many products used at home and in the workplace, including rubber gloves, balloons, rubber bands, pacifiers, baby-bottles, adhesive tape and bandages, and diapers, to name a few; and

WHEREAS, latex gloves have been widely used in medicine since the turn of the century because of their unique advantages in flexibility, strength, elasticity and barrier properties; and

WHEREAS, however the protein in rubber has been proven to cause allergic reactions in certain persons; the thin rubber in gloves and similar products are extremely high in this protein; and

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WHEREAS, some rubber gloves are coated with cornstarch powder, and the rubber protein particles stick to the cornstarch and are released into the air when the gloves are removed; and

WHEREAS, latex allergies include Irritant Contact Dermatitis, with symptoms of itchy, watery eyes, sneezing, or coughing; Allergic Contact Dermatitis, which is similar to a poison ivy reaction; and True Latex Allergies, with symptoms of chest tightness, shortness of breath, shock and even death in latex-sensitive persons, with no previous warning or symptoms; and

WHEREAS, these allergic reactions become progressively worse with repeated exposures, thus the need to identify those who are sensitized and those who already have allergy symptoms is critical; and

WHEREAS, studies from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health indicate that eight to twelve percent (8-12%) of health care workers regularly exposed to latex are sensitized, compared with one to six (1-6%) percent of the general population, with reductions in exposure to latex proteins resulting in decreased sensitization and symptoms; and

WHEREAS, although there is no treatment for latex allergies, avoiding direct contact with latex, wearing non-latex gloves can reduce the risk of reaction, while keeping others from becoming allergic to latex; and

WHEREAS, only recently have health care facilities begun to establish protocols to address the care of patients with latex allergies, including the development of latex allergy screening questionnaires for patients upon their admission to such facilities; and

WHEREAS, some facilities have also created latex-free product carts to accompany patients during their stay, placed barriers between latex items and patients with latex allergies, and/or have required that only latex-free gloves be used by operating room personnel; and

WHEREAS, implementing further latex safety protocols to reduce the risk of allergic reactions to latex will require a concerted effort by the health care industry, including representatives from each of the three perioperative nursing areas, the departments of

anesthesia, surgery, pharmacy, and all other departments, including food services, which are involved in the care of perioperative patients, and emergency medical service personnel; and

WHEREAS, it is paramount to the good health of all Tennesseans that the members of this General Assembly act to ensure its citizens are protected from the harmful effects of latex and other airborne allergens associated with the use of this product; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE-HUNDREDTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, That we strongly urge the Department of Health to inform hospital and emergency service personnel of the dangers associated with latex allergies, and to establish protocols to address the care of patients with latex allergies.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That we also urge the Department of Health to encourage hospitals, in their emergency rooms, along with first responder units, to create latex-free response and stabilizing units.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an enrolled copy of this resolution be transmitted to the Commissioner of Health.